Reading Between the Lines

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subtext fic, i basically just added in all the necessary scenes and whatever to make chox work in canon, because like, They are, heavily, implied in the movie, but that's just what i see, Mild Internalized Homophobia, welcome to the 50s, we're just sad and gay and sad about being gay here

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Reading Between the Lines

by bearwithacowboyhat

Summary

If you took the Dead Poet's Society movie, refocused it on Charlie Dalton, added some scenes to up the gay factor, added some gay thoughts to some preexisting scenes, and basically just rehashed the actual movie to Make It Happen for your unpopular pairing, then you would have my fic.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

From Early Autumn

“We’re not going to do this anymore Charlie, and that’s final.”
“But Meeks, Stevie—”
The pair had just left Neil’s room when Charlie decided to pull Meeks into his room to steal a kiss. His response was less than lukewarm.
“We’re not roommates anymore Charlie, kissing on the sly and sleeping in the same bed can’t happen anymore. Plus, the dorm parents were starting to catch on and I don’t want this getting back to my folks.” Meeks wouldn’t look him in the eye.
“But I still…” He fumbled.
“We’ll still be friends Charlie, don’t freak out. I’ll be helping you with Latin during study group tonight just like usual, but listen, we can’t be fooling around anymore. Okay?”
“Okay.”
This wasn’t how Charlie Dalton was planning on starting his junior year at Hellton.
Last year Charlie’s obsession with floppy-haired boys in soccer shorts had coalesced into a realization that he wasn’t quite the heterosexual golden boy his father wanted him to be.
And he didn’t hate himself for it. It was more like the puzzle pieces fell together and he finally had it all figured out. He kissed his then-roommate, Steven Meeks, as an experiment and then entered into a six-month-long exploration of what it meant to be kind of gay at a straight edge (no pun intended) New England boarding school.
It was nice, he thought for a while he loved Meeks but he didn’t know how to say it. And before he could muster up the courage and the words to say something, they were on summer break. He was in New York with his dad and Meeks was in Maine at his family’s summer cottage. They barely had any contact all summer, a letter or two was written but nothing that even hinted that Charlie was going to be broken up with on the first day of school.
Not broken up with, they weren’t and never would be together. But Charlie still felt the loss as Meeks stoically left Charlie’s room, pushing past Cameron on his way out.
“Already starting fights Dalton?” Cameron asked.
“Shut up Dick.”
“Hey, HEY!” Said Cameron indignantly, but Charlie had already turned away and thrown himself into unpacking. How the fuck was he going to handle this year?

Apparently, Knox Overstreet was how he was going to handle this year.

“The first twenty questions at the end of Chapter 1 are due tomorrow.” He rolled his eyes and looked at Knox, sitting next to him in his Chemistry class. Charlie couldn’t tell if the stress of breaking up with Meeks or the beginning of school was getting to him but he had to quickly look back down at his textbook. He stared at the chemical formulas on the page but his mind was trying to answer other questions.
Why was he embarrassed to make eye contact with Knox? They had been friends for years, meeting before they even started middle school at Hellton. And suddenly his stomach was turning over and his cheeks were getting red. He started tapping his pencil on the desk trying to dispel some of this nervous energy and only when he was sure Knox was completely absorbed by the lecture did he dare and lookup. There was nothing different about him.
His hair still fell in a delicate wave over his forehead and his eyes were still dark colored like black coffee. His nose and chin came to the same decisive point and his mouth still curled into a smirk from the corner.
He glanced around the room, but no other boy seemed to elicit this response.
Knox was the exact same as he had always been, Charlie was the one who was different.

Charlie lagged behind the class later that day as they followed Mr. Keating into the hallway. He could not believe that out of the hundreds of boys at Welton Academy Knox Overstreet had struck his fancy. It wasn’t that Knox was unattractive or dull, it was just him. Knox, Knox Overstreet, his best friend from childhood, his first friend, in some ways.
He put his foot up on a bench and made an honest effort to listen. He wouldn’t admit it, but he loved English and wanted to give the new teacher a chance before he decided whether or not to make his life hell. Charlie tried to listen to the speech that was going on in the hallway but got lost in his thoughts before Keating even asked them to open the hymnal. He was still preoccupied with Knox.
“Mr. Pitts, would you open your hymnal to page 542 and read the first stanza of the poem you find there?” Keating announced over his thoughts.
“‘To the Virgins, to make much of time?’” Charlie couldn’t help but laugh and think of summer trysts of years past when he could have considered himself an innocent man.
“Yes, that's the one. Somewhat appropriate, isn't it?” He was growing on Charlie, this new English teacher.
"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, old time is still a flying, and this

same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying?" Pitts spoke the last line like a question, but Charlie understood perfectly where this was going.
“Thank you Mr. Pitts. ‘Ga-ther ye rose-buds while ye may’ the Latin term for that sentiment is ‘Carpe Diem’—who knows what that means?”
“Carpe Diem—that’s ‘seize the day.’” Charlie glanced towards where Meeks’ voice came from the other side of the room. He had to admit he wasn’t over it. Yet.
“Why does the writer use these lines?”
“Because, he’s in a hurry,” Charlie called out absentmindedly.
“No! Ding! Thank you for playing anyway.” Charlie smirked it off, it was a lame analysis. He quickly became unfocused as the conversation went on. His eyes wandered around the hanging pennants and plaques and settled, where else, on Knox. Charlie considered the back of the boy's head and then slowly let his eyes drop down and down until they were called forward.
He stared blankly into the faces of the hallway portraits, seeing only Knox’s face behind his eyes until “Carpe...hear it? Carpe...Carpe Diem” Keating whispered.
“Seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary.”
Knox turned around to smile at him and suddenly he knew exactly how to seize his day, nay, his year.
~

He was going to make Knox Overstreet fall in love with him. He didn’t like being obsessed with people. It wasn’t his style, so the sooner Knoxious had a crush on him the sooner he wouldn’t have to play this role of the fawning idiot.
“Of course? Then what’s the problem?” Asked Cameron. Charlie glanced down again at his paper again. Trig, of course.
He took in the crowded common room filled with his casually dressed peers playing chess or pirating radio. He locked eyes with Meeks as he hopefully searched for a radio signal to connect with the world outside the gated grounds. He smiled, but Meeks passed over his shining eyes. Great.
He tried to refocus on the Trig set but the heavy walnut doors to the common room opened and just the boy he wanted to see entered the common room. “How’s dinner?” He asked Knox.
“Huh?”
The affected look, the defeated lean— something was not right with Knox, “How was dinner?” He tried again.
“Terrible. Awful.”
Bullshit.

“Why? What happened?” He pressed.
“Tonight, I met, the most beautiful girl, I have ever seen in my entire life.”
“Are you crazy? What's wrong with that?” Neil interjected.
“She’s practically engaged. To Chet Danbury.”
Charlie immediately went stoic. A panicked smiled smeared across his face, which in turn melted (much like his plans for the year) into a grimace.
This girl, Chris Noel, had a boyfriend. Which would have been a saving grace had the boyfriend not been Chet Danbury. Charlie knew him before he was expelled from Welton. He definitely called Charlie a fag once or twice before he was kicked out for “violating the honor code” or something. But Charlie knew, ‘practically engaged’ or not, Chet couldn’t keep a girl for more than a few months before he got bored. So sooner or later Chris Noel would end up single again and good-guy Knox would be able to get his girl.
But he threw on a smile despite the predestined doom of his junior year plan. “Did ya see her naked?” He asked as he slipped past his lovestruck friend.
“Very funny Dalton,” But Charlie wasn’t really laughing.
~
“You mean it was a bunch of guys sitting around, reading poetry?”
“No Mr. Overstreet, it was just guys. We weren’t a Greek organization. We were Romantics. We didn’t just read poetry, we let it drip from our tongues, like honey. Spirits soared, women swooned, and Gods were created gentlemen. Not a bad way to spend an evening, eh?”
Keating’s words created an oil painting of academic debauchery in Charlie’s mind. The Dead Poets Society was right up Charlie’s lane. Mid-level rule-breaking, poetry, and carpe diem. As he crouched on the lawn beside his friends he could somewhat see things looking up again. This could be something to get him away from the oppressive attitude laid into the bricks that built this boarding school and maybe get him closer to Knox. Goosebumps raised on his skin despite the end of summer warmth that clung to the campus.

“I’m in.”
He had agreed before Neil even posed the question. He was going, and he was going to get his boy. They marched across the sunny field, it was still early enough in the fall to walk around without jackets, as he and Neil hounded the other boys to join them. Hager was yelling at the doors, the bells were ringing, it was time for afternoon classes. But Charlie had to know one thing before he ran across the threshold into the building.
“What about you Knox?”

“I don’t know Charlie,” He wouldn’t let him go without hearing some kind of assurance. Charlie prayed he’d take the bait as he placed his hand over Knox’s steady heart wishing his would match that pace.
“Come on Knox it’ll help you get Chris.” He assured him rushed towards the doors, he couldn’t let his friend see how much he was blushing.
“Yeah—how?” Knox grabbed his shoulder and he couldn't control the rush of emotions that his touch garnered.
“Women swoon!” He clutched Knox’s arm in return and he took off, nearly shaking with nervous energy as he ran down the hallway.
“But why do they swoon? Charlie, tell me why they swoon. Charlie!” That was something for him to know and for Knox to one day figure out.

~

He wasn’t necessarily hiding his sexuality from the other boys. But he did choose to write a love poem for Knox when he knew that Cameron would be out of their room, kissing the ass of every teacher at Hellton during office hours. Meeks knew, but no one else. And Charlie was sure that some of them would accept him if he said anything about liking boys and girls but he knew that others would certainly ostracize him. Cameron specifically would let the administration would know within seconds and Charlie would be off to some kind of reformatory before the day was out. Therefore he had to rip up a good quality contraband Playboy to craft his love poem for Knox.
Charlie sat in his empty dorm room twirling a pencil between his fingers staring at some ancient poem by a man named Abraham Cowley located on page 384 of their Hymnal. He liked it well enough, there were some changes to be made though.
“Teach me to love?” The beginning was nice, he scrawled that line in the margins of the centerfold.
“Go teach thyself, more wit,” He thought of them together in class and added the line to the page.
“I chief Professor, am I,” he rounded out the stanza but Cowley didn’t stop talking about teaching and school and he wasn’t going to be cock-blocked by Hellton so he skipped the rest of the first part.
He liked the mythological romance of the next stanza though, “The God of Love, if such a thing there be,” he scratched into the thin newsprint.
He smirked and finished writing, “And learn to love from me.”
~
As he sprinted through the ghostly woods that night Charlie prayed to some higher power, God or Thoreau he didn’t care which, that this would work. That Knox would somehow see and feel his intention in

the little Indian cave. Everything around him was in shades of black and blue and the night air burned his eyes, lungs, and throat. He pulled his hands inside the wooly sleeves of his overcoat to keep his fingertips warm. Energy radiated from his body like the breath fogging out of the fellow boy's mouths.

"'I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.'" They were cramped into the little cave, where the smoke of a failed campfire still stung Charlie's nose.
"I second that!" He looked at Knox, smirking.
As the boys told scary stories, Charlie glanced past the readers to see Knox's face, illuminated by flashlight beams. He felt antsy, anticipatory, he lit a cigarette just give himself something to do. Finally, after Cameron had been speaking for far too long, he couldn't take it anymore, "Do you want to hear a real poem?" It was time. He stood before a jury of his peers as his teenage love went on trial.
He declined the poetry book, cleared his throat like a busybody and unfolded his paper, letting the image of the topless girl register with the group before he began.
Charlie glanced around the room like a rhetorician and found that Knox was staring straight at him, not at all concerned with the centerfold he had written on. This only invigorated his speech as he started directly into Knox's brown eyes. He kept his gaze traveling around the room so as not to draw suspicion, and practice what he learned in seventh-grade rhetoric camp.
"And learn to love from me," He delivered his final line to Knox. Here's hoping. He winked at his wrapped audience.
"Did you write that?"
The room exploded with laughter and applause.
"Abraham Cowley," He had to give credit where credit was due, "Okay, who's next?"
As Charlie settled back onto his uneven and damp perch in the cave he looked to his friend, wondering if the message had at all landed with him. But Knox Overstreet was absorbed with eating an apple. It seemed Charlie's words has landed upon deaf ears or simply ignorant ears who can't seem to comprehend a confession even when it is read to them. He continued smiling and laughing through this friend's performances.
Would he bother to notice me? Or give two shits about what I do? Charlie wondered as they danced out of the cave, singing the written words of dead men into the cold night air.
~
You are an old friend, yet also a stranger.

My love burns like candlelight in a dark house, small yet powerful
And if I only could…

"Charlie?"
"Y-yeah? He stuttered, snapped out of his poetic reverie by the very person he was writing about. This time he had sequestered himself in the library to write his poem for Keatings' class, his plan was to do something like Cowley would have done but better. More romantic, with a better focus on him and Knox, something mischievous, something honest. He casually laid his arms over his English notebook and gazed at his friend across the oak table, hoping Knox didn't notice any of his crossed-out promises.
"That poem that you read during the meeting," Charlie stopped breathing for a moment, "it was really good."
"Uh, thanks, I mean I didn't…"
Barely noticing his disjointed words Knox Overstreet barreled on.
"Do you think you could help me write something like that for Chris? If Keating's right and girls really do fall for this stuff then I think I could probably…"
As he continued to ramble about girls and iambic pentameter Charlie got more and more frustrated. Not for any specific reason. Maybe just because Knox was thick-headed and he was already tired of crafting hints. If only he could have understood the intent of the poem from the first meeting then Charlie wouldn't have to be listening to his voice bounce around the dusty volumes in the Welton library. He leaned his head on his hand and quietly wished that Chris Noel would fall off the face of the Earth (or at least go to boarding school in Sweden).
He took a deep breath before interrupting his friend, "Okay, so what do you want then?"
"Can you look at this?" Knox produced a folded sheet of lined paper from his jacket and laid it before Charlie. He discreetly slipped the notebook, and his own poem, into this lap and he picked up Knox's. He smiled at his friend but then he started reading
At the very least, Keating couldn't chastise him for cheating. The poem read like Knox Overstreet trying to romance a girl by writing like Shakespeare's illiterate younger brother. The rhyme was trite, the imagery weak (at best), and despite not having any source Charlie felt like he had read it before. He could fix it, he would have added some kind of metaphor and expanded upon the themes, tinkered with the word choice and maybe added a rhyming couplet at the end; but he was being presented with a unique opportunity.
Charlie suddenly was in the place to sabotage Knox's love life. He shook off the lackluster language and handed it back.

“Looks good,” Charlie commented with a smile.
Knox lit up; this must be what it's like to look at Chris for him.
“Really? I’ve never really written poetry before so I wasn’t sure…”
“Nah! It sounds good to me, I like your...diction,” He decided that wasn’t the worst part of the piece.
“Do you have any edits or anything?” Knox asked, rocking on his heels.
“Not a thing. She’ll love it,” Charlie commented with the same fake smile.
“Perfect! I guess I’ll go practice then - thanks, Charlie!” He was rewarded for his hard work with a hair ruffle and Knox disappeared amongst the shelves. It was only Charlie who was aware that he was sending a lamb to the slaughter. He hoped this Chris girl had decent standards and would find this ode, well, odious.
~
“To Chris.”
Charlie glanced up from his notebook in anticipation, unable to stop himself from quirking a brow at his friend’s very public announcement of love to their English class. It was like if he got up and said, “To my idiot best friend who I wish would figure out that I’m in love with him so I don’t have to deal with it myself.” Part of him quietly wished he would have stood up and said, “To Charlie.”
His classmates snickered through the piece and Charlie’s newest plan started falling apart. Once everyone at Welton had shamed Knox for the poem he’d never read it to a girl.
Fuck.
He immediately started rewriting his own poem for Knox, fearing a similar reaction to a love poem addressed to an unknown, but very handsome, recipient. He was halfway through the revised first stanza when his dejected friend slumped back into his desk.
“No, no. It's not stupid,” Keating reassured Knox, “It's a good effort.” Charlie administered one hearty pat on the back for effort, trying to pretend for Knox’s sake that it was still good.
“It touched on one of the major themes, love. A major theme not only in poetry, but life. Mr. Hopkins, you were laughing. You're up,” Keating finished.
Part of Charlie wanted nothing more than to read his unedited poem for the class. But in this world where “To Charlie” would never cross Knox’s lips, he was better safe than sorry.
~
At the very least Charlie had soccer. He tuned out the world and his own brain whenever he played with his friends so he didn’t, in theory, have to think about Knox for a little while.
Yes. Theoretically, Knox Overstreet would be forgotten, but it’s

somewhat hard to forget about someone who is not only wearing very short soccer shorts but is also the most obnoxious forward ever known to the game of soccer. Knox played like a puppy, always running the ball and not paying attention to anyone else on the field. He'd occasionally trip over his own feet, tumbling over himself and falling to the ground, but he would spring back up and chase the ball again, just like a dog.
It was a miracle they won the game considering how distracted Charlie was in the goal. Even the slight bite of the late-autumn air couldn't keep him present on the torn-up soccer field. The one shot he managed to save was rewarded with a hair tousle from Neil but nothing from his handsome forward.

"Hey Charlie," Said Neil after the game. They were the last two gathering their things before heading back to the dorms before dinner.
"Are you okay?"
"I'm alright. How are you Neil?" he answered, absently as he closed up his bag.
"I'm great, the play's going well, but I'm serious Charlie," He turned to stare him down, "You seem different these days. Did something happen?" He felt like Neil was waiting for him to say something about his dad so they could commiserate. Or maybe he had noticed something else.
"Well…" Charlie started fiddling with his zipper pulls. He had a choice now, he could be brutally honest or just skirt the issue, "Something's been happening for a while now."
Charlie couldn't avoid Neil. They had also been friends pre-Hellton days. Charlie remembered them meeting at some kind of corporate event their parents were both invited to one Christmas. He and Neil had been fast friends ever since Charlie offered him a stolen cigarette. But Neil was kind to a fault. His face was too open and well-meaning. The setting sun was making his features softer and his eyes glitter with sincerity.
"Yeah?"
"Yeah...I'm um…" He had never really planned how this situation would go. Should he lead with his sexuality and then launch into the Knox situation or just charge ahead with Knox and let Neil catch-up?
"Is it Knox? Because I feel like it's Knox," Neil suddenly interrupted his thoughts.
Charlie froze.
"What about him?"
"Well, something seems different between you two. I mean there was that poem from the first meeting…"
"Hey, I basically copied that…"

“And you’re always with him…”
“Yes because we’ve been friends…”
“But the thing is that when he went to hunt down Chris that one day, you looked so sad and stared out every window that looked over the gate all afternoon. Like you were waiting for him.”
A rebuttal died on Charlie’s tongue. Neil wasn’t wrong. He remembered that day, Knox dressing up in what he believed to be “public school attire,” Charlie had leant him a flannel. And yes, he was waiting. Waiting to see if a blonde-haired girl would be perched on the handlebars of his bicycle, waiting to see if he even still had a fighting chance with a boy who thought that wearing a cream-colored sweater tied across his chest was going to make him blend in at a football game.
He took a deep breath. “That’s because I was. I wanted him to come back. I wanted him to come back alone.”
“Without Chris…”
“Because then I might still have a chance with him.” Charlie delivered this straight to the ground. He tried to find words in his head to follow up that statement but he couldn't. He had no idea what else to say. Neil was overwhelmingly silent, and when Charlie found the courage to tear his eyes from the dried grass he saw Neil nodding solemnly.
“Already planning what you’re going to say to Administration?” He said, only half-joking.
“No, I wouldn’t! I could never! It’s just, I understand what you mean Charlie,” Neil began hesitantly.
“Oh?” Said Charlie.
Neil bit his lip and nodded staring across the grounds to where their rowdy group of friends was about to enter the main school building. Before ascending the stone steps one red-headed figure turned back, paused, and waved to Neil, who tried to repress a smile before waving back.
The realization hit Charlie like a boy on a bicycle, “Anderson?”
Neil uncomfortably tried to put his hands in his pockets before remembering that his shorts didn’t have any, “Yep.”
“And you’re roommates…”
“It’s not easy,” said Neil as he pushed his bangs back and stared at the doors Todd had disappeared into. Part of Charlie wanted to say something about him and Meeks but he felt like there could be a better time.
“How long did you know…”
“About myself? Probably forever honestly. My first kiss was with a girl named Molly in the fifth grade and I kissed her just because I really wanted to hold hands with her boyfriend. But with Todd? I think it was when I was hounding him to come to that first meeting. I didn’t

even know why I wanted him there so badly, but I absolutely needed it. And sometime during the first meeting I knew," Neil was smiling uncontrollably.
"I didn't know that I wasn't alone," said Charlie suddenly.
"I didn't either Charlie, how long have you…" Neil started.
"Beginning of last year. But I didn't think of Knox like that until a few months ago though. He's been my best friend for so long, it's so strange sometimes to think how fast things change…" Charlie's thoughts were interrupted by the long and loud strokes of the clocktower bell, filling the darkening skies with its monotonous tone. It was like he was being brought back to earth, the sun was nearly down and the air had a deeper chill to it; dinner was being served right now.
"Oh shit…" He murmured as the pair started to jog across the field. Charlie didn't need another infraction for missing grace. Again.
Neil kept pace with him as they attempted to beat the bell tolls to the door. But by the time the last one rang out they were barely at the foot of the stairs. Charlie was panting a little and his legs burned.
"Hey," he said before they started up the steps, "I won't tell anyone about…"
"I won't either," Neil quickly added. "But good luck with him."
"And all the same to you," replied Charlie, as though they had just drawn up a business deal.
Charlie walked a step behind Neil through the hallways. Out of all the years he had known Neil Perry, Charlie had never felt closer to him than at this moment.

From Hallowed Times

Chapter Summary

As Joni Mitchell once said, "It's the unraveling"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Charlie had found the saxophone at the same time that he found his trusty set of bongos, when raiding an old music closet to see if the miniature bust he stole of Headmaster Hoedel in eighth grade was still hidden there. (It was.)
The bongos were an obvious steal, but he couldn't get the saxophone out of his head. His father had uncharacteristically given him a choice growing up of what instrument he wanted to learn. A young Charlie, not wanting anything to do with the musical world, naturally choose the instrument that sounded the worst when you played it poorly. Clarinets could be misplayed in a variety of exciting ways, one variation of poor technique made the instrument sound like an over-sized, black-lacquered kazoo. Another turned the poor woodwind into a symphony of nasty sounding squeaks. But after a while even Charlie grew tired of the hour of headache-inducing raucous he caused every day when his mother forced him to practice, so he learned to play it properly. But did he like it? No. He still abhorred the thing and refused to play it now, but he did know a lot about music and technique. And he hated saxophones less. He liked jazz, mainly because his father hated it. But the one time he had been near a jazz club with his father Charlie heard someone describe the saxophone as "sonorous" and he hadn't been able to get that word out of his head since. Sonorous.
And finally, a week after the initial bongo theft, the saxophone had been nabbed as well.
Charlie was surprised to discover how similar the instruments were, saxophone and clarinet. The mouthpiece was larger and there were keys in place of the recorder-like holes, but the breath support and tonguing was exactly the same. The feelings and intentions were much different though. Saxophone had a different emotion behind it and a different sound. Suddenly the word 'sonorous' made much more sense than the dictionary definition.
But this was back in September. Now it was October, nearing Halloween and he had only recently figured out how to marry this beautiful instrument and the words he poured over with his friends.

“Attaboy Pittsie, inhale deeply,” he smirked at his friends gathered in the cave, each at different levels of competence with smoking their pipes. He wasn’t an expert himself but he’d been bored enough over the summers to learn how to properly smoke one.
“Come on, Knox. Join in,” but Knox looked, as Keating put it, properly morose.
“Yeah Knox, we’re from the government. We’re here to help,” Cameron assured him before everyone started jeering “Chrissss.”
“That’s not funny!” Knox shot back.
“Knock it off, smoke your pipes,” Charlie added. While not being particularly fond of Chris himself, her being an obstacle to accomplishing what he set out to do a month ago, he felt bad for Knox.
But the Poets attention was quickly drawn away from their lovestruck friend to Neil Perry as he clambered into the cave holding, out of all things, a tattered lamp.
“What is that, Neil?”
“Duh. It's a lamp, Meeks.”
Charlie started wetting the reed of his sax.
“No. This is the god of the cave.”
“The god of the cave.”
He channeled all his years of clarinet skills into playing the loudest and most obnoxious note his alto could muster, which reverberated around the cave. Like the trumpeting forebearers of their new god.
“What do you say we start this meeting?” He looked around expectantly at the gathered members, eyes coming to rest upon his still desolate friend.
This one’s for you Knoxious.
Charlie stood up, adjusted his sax, and announced, “Gentlemen, ‘Poetrusic’ by Charles Dalton.” He was quite proud of this composition. It was something to make the new-age beat poets proud. He played his terrible cacophony for his assembled friends.
“Laughing, crying, tumbling, mumbling. Gotta do more. Gotta be more.”
He sent his next jumble of notes straight to Pitts just for being mean to Knox.
“Chaos screaming, chaos dreaming. Gotta do more! Gotta be more!”
When he finally reached the melodic section the entire room was wrapped around his little finger. All eyes were trained on him and all ears on the smooth jazz that emerged from the bell like fog over the lake. As he knelt before Knox he noticed the music seemed to be having the opposite effect from what Charlie intended. He hit his last note and reached forward to ruffle his hair, praying for at least a smile of recognition out of the gloomy boy.

“That was great. Where did you learn to play like that?” At the very least Neil seemed earnestly impressed.
“My parents made me take the clarinet for years,” He admitted settling down again next to Knox. Charlie keenly aware of the miserable emotions that seemed to roll off him in waves.
“I love the clarinet.” Leave it to Cameron.
“I hated it. The saxophone…” he mused, “The saxophone is more...sonorous.” This was one of the times Charlie was truly thankful to have friends like these, people who would appreciate a well-chosen word.
“Vocabulary,” Meeks commented and smiled at him. This was practically the closest thing to a compliment or even a mere nicety he had received from Meeks since September. But Charlie was left little time to bask in a return to earnest friendship.
“I can't take it anymore,” said Knox suddenly, “If I don't have Chris, I'm gonna kill myself.”
“Knoxious, you've gotta calm down,” said Charlie reaching for his friend’s wrist.
“No, Charlie. That's just my problem. I've been calm all my life. I'll do something about that,” He jumped up to leave the cave setting all the Dead Poets on edge.
“Where are you going?” Asked Neil with concern.
“What are you gonna do?” Charlie added.
“I'm gonna call her.” As the Poets sprang up to rally around Knox, Charlie merely leaned back to play a new series of poorly contrived scales. He had no interest in watching Knox kill off all of his chances. And yet he trudged behind his friends, cradling his brass baby in his arms, once again looking to God or Whitman to do something to end his plight. Maybe finally send Chris to that oh-so-appealing (and imaginary) Swedish boarding school. He saw Neil look back at him with a look of pity, but he waved him off. Charlie was fine.

Once he finally joined his friends by the one public payphone in the school, Knox was stoically staring at the numbered dial coins in hand. Charlie leaned against a post, not necessarily wanting this call to begin but definitely waiting for its end.
At a snail’s pace, Knox inserted his coins and dialed the number. Charlie played silent scales with his fingers as he waited for the show to commence.
“Hello?” Came a sweet and demure voice from the earpiece. Knox slammed the phone down, much to the visible disappointment of their gathered friends.
“She's gonna hate me,” Knox said to the unrelenting faces of Dead Poets Society, “The Danburys will hate me. My parents will kill me.”

No one gave up their poker faces.
“All right, goddamn it. You're right. ‘Carpe diem.’ Even if it kills me.”
Charlie could see the smallest of smiles sneak onto their friends faces as Knox picked up the phone for the second time. Neil’s shoulders shook with an inaudible laugh but Charlie was far away from their gleeful smiles.
“Hello?” The same angelic voice lilted over the phone.
“Hello, Chris?” Knox asked brusquely.
“Yes?”
“Hi. This is Knox Overstreet…”
Charlie took a deep breath and moved to join Knox by the phone. Praying she might simply end the poor boy’s suffering with a tasteful,
“Who?”
“Oh, yes. Knox. Glad you called!”
That makes one of us.
“She’s glad I called,” he reported in a whisper to the gathered Poets.
“Listen,” her condensed voice continued over the airwaves, “Chet's parents are going out of town this weekend, so he's having a party. Would you like to come?”
“Would I like to come to a party?” It was over for Charlie, he was done. In many ways, he lost before any game had even begun. And ever since he first tried to make his best friend fall in love with him, since he first fell in love with his best friend, his efforts have been for naught. But Charlie knew, somewhere in the back of his mind, that this was never meant to be. Just like how Meeks had pushed him away Knox would probably be the same. And he’d likely known this all along, he just didn’t want to admit to it. But now was his time of reckoning.
It was only this knowledge of defeat that prompted his next words,
“Yes. Say, yes.”
As the conversation continued the boys crowded around them grew only more antsy with excitement as Knox dribbled down the field to score his goal of a party invite.
“Thank you. I'll see you. Bye.” The phone clicked back into place and Knox let out the most barbaric yawp ever heard to man, somewhere the ghost of Walt Whitman shivered. The boys around them laughed amongst themselves, but Charlie was not in the mood.
“Can you believe it?” Knox stared at the ceiling in ecstasy, “She was gonna call me. She invited me to a party with her.” He looked at Charlie with a romantic glimmer in his eyes.
“At Chet Danbury's house.” He reminded Knox.
“Yeah.”
“Well?” Knox clearly wasn’t picking up the flaw in his logic.
“So?”

“So, you don't really think she means you're going with her?” He knew Knox was happy and Knox had earned the right to be happy. That wasn’t going to stop Charlie from giving him this reality check.
“Well, of course not, Charlie. But that's not the point. That's not the point at all,” Knox explained defensively.
“What is the point?” He pressed.
“The point, Charlie, is, uh…”
“Yeah?” He wanted to hear this.
“…That she was thinking about me. I've only met her once, and already she's thinking about me.”
And I’ve thought about you every day this year. What difference should it make?
“Damn it. It's gonna happen, guys. I feel it. She is going to be mine.”
And with that Knox disappeared up the stairs to the boy's shouts of “Carpe! Carpe!”
‘If I don't have Chris, I'm gonna kill myself.’ You’re not special for feeling that way. He thought as he lay down on his creaky, standard-issue, Welton bed. He stared at the ceiling, cracked from water damage and age, and laid his arms over his face. He could barely count on Chet Danbury as a fail-safe. Chet Danbury was more of a guarantee that Knox could seduce Chris. He was just an asshole, and Knox, even with his aloof ways, wasn’t. Knox was a good guy. That was part of why Charlie wished he was his. Everyone, in the end, wanted a good guy, didn’t they? Someone to hold your hand and buy you ice cream, unfeasible in this town, but still. What was so wrong with wanting someone to cuddle up to who would tell him that he had pretty eyes. Charlie groaned and wished that he was on good enough terms with Meeks to borrow his radio. Charlie wanted nothing more than to tune out the world.
This is going to be the longest week of my life.

Every day was just another day nearer to the ill-fated party when Knox invariably returned to Welton all smiles and laughs since he had finally got the girl. Every day Charlie grew quieter and quieter. By Wednesday he couldn’t stand going to lunch just to pretend to be happy and sit next to the boy who made his heartache with every look. He could deal with the demerits, nothing felt like it mattered anymore.
The article came from a spiteful place. I’m sure someone would be much happier if we could just have girls at Welton so he wouldn’t have to bike through the snow all winter to see her.
It also came from a scared place. Maybe if we had girls here, I’d stop falling in love with every boy who smiles at me.
He slipped it in under the name of the Dead Poets, even though it

wasn’t for them. It was for Knox, like how everything was for Knox. But Charlie was apart of it and so was Knox and it was better than attaching his name to it outright.
By Friday, he was losing it. His insides felt hollow, he didn’t feel real. But instead like a scarecrow, just propped up to go through the motions of being alive. He needed something to make himself feel like a person again. The bike ride through the chilly fall air, just starting to threaten winter, to get to town helped a little. The girls he found in town, and specifically their liquor, helped a lot.

Chapter End Notes

Quickie chapter to finish off Charlie's POV

From Knoxious

Chapter Summary

As Joni Mitchell ALSO once said, "From both sides now"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“If you knock one more time I will personally break all your fingers—oh shit Knox…”
Knox is in bad shape, he knows he’s in bad shape, which is why he’s at Charlie’s door. Charlie, among other things, had a whole drugstore worth of products in his dorm which he used to fix himself up. Everything was over the counter, but if you needed something that was too embarrassing to go to the nurse for then Charlie was your guy. Which was precisely why Knox was here.
He’d made a lot of mistakes that night, but the shortlist included going to Chet Danbury's party, drinking whatever was handed to him at Chet Danbury's party and then kissing Chet Danbury’s girlfriend. The kiss didn’t feel like a mistake though, it’s what Knox had wanted since that September evening when he first laid eyes on Chris Noel. What made it feel like a mistake was the painful ache left after Chet’s fist made contact with his nose and the resulting blood that had rolled over his lips in the Danbury’s humid basement.
He couldn’t get his nose to stop bleeding even though he knew it wasn’t broken and he needed aspirin anyway to sleep and stave off the hangover that was looming over tomorrow morning; therefore he was at Charlie’s. Charlie honestly didn’t look too much better, his cheeks had an artificial red tint to them like he was wearing rouge, and his eyes were dark.
“It looks worse than it is, I just need some aspirin and for my nose to stop bleeding,” He said pushing past Charlie into the room he shared with Cameron. He wasn’t worried about Cameron right now, he slept with an eye mask and earplugs because, apparently, Charlie snored.
“Well have you been applying pressure to it? And why haven't you cleaned up yet?” Charlie had turned to start rummaging through his drawers for gauze and (hopefully) some aspirin.
“Um, no, I just left and tried to get back here as fast as I could…”
“What did you do to yourself Knoxious?” Charlie paused once more to take in the graphic sight of Knox’s face. He then swiped a glass of water from Cameron’s desk in which Charlie soaked gauze to clean Knox’s bloodied face. Knox could do this himself, but he didn’t mind

Charlie taking care of him.
“I kind of kissed Chris—”
Charlie stopped gingerly dabbing at Knox’s face to reply “Ha! I can see she didn’t take it too well, though I didn’t know a featherweight like Chris Noel could punch that hard. Now, hold this to your nose and press,” He said, handing Knox fresh gauze.
“I don’t know how hard Chris punches, Chet Danbury on the other hand…”
“Did he break your nose or something?” Charlie took Knox’s face in his hands and pulled their faces unnecessarily close together. Knox could smell something on his breath.
“No, he didn’t, are you drunk?” Knox said, indignantly pushing his friend away.
“I could ask the same of you Knoxious, you smell like shitty moonshine and feet,” Charlie snapped back, seeming to have lost all his tenderness.
“Well yeah, I was at a party. Why were you drinking at a meeting?”
“One of the girls brought whiskey, can’t remember for the life of me her goddamn name…”
“Wait…girls? Charlie, what happened tonight?” Knox was genuinely confused, he let his hands fall away from his face to discover the bleeding had finally stopped.
Charlie started picking at his hands, “Not much, found some local girls who wanted to have fun. Quoted some Shakespeare at them, drank half of their liquor, and now everyone’s livid because I published some stupid article in the paper about admitting girls to Welton. Also, it’s Nuwanda now.”
Knox could barely process the barrage of information just thrown at him by Charlie, he blamed the alcohol. “What’s Nuwanda now?”
“Me, idiot. It’s my name, it has roots in the African language and means ‘wanderer,’ like Walt Whitman,” Charlie was pinching the bridge of his nose like this pained him to say, “I may or may not have renamed myself.”
“Charlie—”
“Nuwanda.”
“Shut up,” Knox maneuvered Charlie to be sitting on his unmade bed and looked straight into his eyes, “What is going on with you?
“Something’s been up since I got invited to this party. I’ve barely seen you and you never talk at meals—when you bother to show up that is. And I have no clue what is wrong with you these days. I know you’re spontaneous and all but what the hell? Sneaking girls on campus, and what is this article all about? Tell me. Now,” Knox added for emphasis.
“I really don’t care to talk about it Knoxious,” Charlie stood up, not

making eye contact with Knox, and started opening drawers, looking for something.
“Charlie I’m one of your best friends, something’s different and I know because I’ve known you all my life. What’s going on that you can’t tell me about?”
Charlie slammed the top drawer closed loud enough that Knox worried that Cameron would wake up. Despite his anger, Charlie gently tossed an almost empty bottle of aspirin at Knox.
“This is what you came here for, now get out of my room.”
“Not until you tell me what’s wrong,” Knox stood up and started advancing towards Charlie.
“I will punch you Knox, and break your nose so Chet Danbury doesn’t have to, now leave me alone,” He had a hand against Knox’s chest and pushed him back, trying to force him out the door.
Knox grabbed his hand and pulled him nearer, “Charlie—”
Charlie kissed him. Knox was shocked that Charlie took the opportunity of their closeness to pull Knox to him and kiss him. But he let the kiss linger just long enough that when he pulled away neither boy can claim that it was a mistake.
“Charlie…” Said Knox quietly, unsure of what to follow that with.
“I didn’t mean that—for it to happen like that—just leave me alone…” Charlie had turned away.
“Hey…it’s okay,” Knox advanced towards his friend and put a hand on his shoulder to discover that he was crying. Charlie whirled around.
“It’s really fucking not Knox. Nothing is okay and nothing will be okay, because I love you. You know that? I’ve loved you since the beginning of the year and you started chasing that girl and I thought to myself ‘Damn, I wish I was the one he wrote love poems about and the one he was putting everything on the line for’ because I would do all those things for you Knox,” He could tell that Charlie was starting to fall apart. “From the moment you got invited to that party I all wanted was for you to think about me. No, from the beginning of this year I’ve been trying and waiting for you to think of me the same way. And I’m going to get expelled because of that article and you probably still wouldn’t give me the time of day.”
“I’m - I’m sorry…” Knox started lamely.
“I don’t give a fuck about your apologies, because you don’t feel anything for me. That shit hurts Knox, you know that” he gestured to Knox’s nose.
“But I can…”
“You can do whatever you want, go get run over by Chet Danbury’s car or ride your bike into the lake, I don’t care. Just get out of my room.” With that Knox was definitively shoved out of Charlie’s dorm room, aspirin in hand, and locked out. Knox stood there in shock as he

heard Charlie start to cry from the other side of the wooden door. He put a hand on the knob, but he slowly retracted it. Charlie didn't want to see him now, and he had to respect that. His impulse was to help—do something. And yet he walked away.

Knox felt helpless like he couldn't save Charlie from himself. He sat uncomfortably in the cathedral as Charlie answered his phone call, offering it cheekily to Nolan with his gaping mouth as if he was surprised himself.
He didn't know what to say, or what to do, as Charlie limped back into the dorm hallway on the verge of tears after meeting with Nolan. His stiff-legged walk told Knox everything he needed to know about the meeting, and just like the night before he was speechless. He couldn't even meet Charlie's eyes because he felt partially complicit. Like it was his fault too. And yet here he was, Charlie was on the brink of expulsion and he couldn't talk to him. He wanted to say something but had no clue what he needed to say. Charlie had been right, and Knox hated that
He overheard the brief exchange between Neil and Charlie and knew he had a little time before Charlie pulled another stunt that would actually get him kicked out of Welton to figure out something to tell him. Something to fix this. Because the words were there. Right on the tip of his tongue. But not realized or known yet.
~
Of course, it snowed.
The calendars had just been turned to November and suddenly Welton Academy was blanketed in snow. But the heroic weather conditions would not deter Knox, for he was on a mission. He had a rusty Welton bike, nearly dead flowers from his mother, a sick note for his first-period class, and a poem (unreviewed by Charles Dalton, because Knox knew what a great copy editor he was.) He swung his leg over the frigid bicycle seat and was off to the races.
Even pedaling as fast as he could, there was still a significant chunk of travel time before he reached Chris's school. Knox utilized this time to think of what in the world he could say to Charlie to apologize. 'Sorry, I don't like boys' didn't seem to cut it in this situation.
Sorry, I should have been a better friend.
Sorry, I just didn't gage the situation.
Sorry, if you were a girl it might have been different…

The poem went off without a hitch. Mostly. Was Chris happy to see him (especially after the party)? No. But, did Chet Danbury turn him into lunch meat? Also no. That, in Knox's mind, constituted a direct victory. And even if Chris didn't say anything to him he did it. He was wearing her down, he could tell. Therefore, in this case, doing it was

good enough.
“What did she say? I know she had to say something!” Charlie called after him as he left the Dead Poets in a state of shock and awe in the Welton hallway. Neil may have been the actor of the group but it seemed Charlie was the best at playing pretend. Knox could occasionally pick up on some kind of different feeling when Charlie talked to him but other than that, it seemed that they were both content to pretend the kiss never happened.
Pretend being the keyword for Knox. He found himself unable to stop thinking about it. He hadn’t kissed many people in his time, and even though it was only for a second there was something markedly different about kissing Charlie. Knox couldn’t pinpoint what it was though. He wanted to chalk it up to Charlie being a boy and end his line of questioning there. But something was still tugging at his heart, those words still forming on his tongue. He leaned against the wall in the boys' bathroom as Charlie unveiled a red lightning bolt painted on his bare chest.
Knox caught a quick glimpse of him and immediately looked out the window.
“It's an Indian warrior symbol for virility. Makes me feel potent, like it can drive girls crazy,” He explained, smirking at their gathered friends.
Seems it’s not just girls, Knox thought as he trailed his friends out of the dorms and through the halls towards the school’s exit and Mr. Keating’s idling car. Charlie walked just behind him whistling, seemingly content with having just thrown Knox’s life into limbo.
Why did he care so much about how Charlie looked, or acted, or felt. If Knox concentrated hard enough, he could still feel Charlie’s fingers on his face, sponging up blood.
The chatter of the group died down and Knox nearly crashed into Pitts who suddenly stood stock still and stared at someone who had just entered the building.
Chris.
“Chris.”
That’s right, I love Chris. Not Charlie Dalton.
He still spared a look at the boy who had rudely intruded on his thoughts with his soft lips and Indian warrior symbols, but he immediately grabbed her arm to get her out of the building before Hager could pull some clause out of thin air about not being able to breathe in the direction of a girl on school grounds.
“It's fine for you to come barging into my school and make a complete fool out of me?” She didn’t look it, but behind the blonde bob and doe eyes, Chris Noel was quick and clever and always ready to tear Knox to shreds with excuses.

“I didn't mean to make a fool out of you,” He tried to defend himself.
“Well, you did,” she stated with disdain, “Chet found out. And it took everything I could do to keep him from coming here and killing you. Knox, you have got to stop this stuff.”
“I can't, Chris. I love you,” He said that as much for himself as he did for her.

The play was wonderful, Chris’ warmth beside him and her soft hand in his was a welcome presence. The poetry coming over the lip of the stage and cozy theater made everything feel perfect.
But still Knox felt uneasy, besides the Charlie Dalton situation there was also a creeping feeling that something would go wrong. When things were too perfect Knox always knew that something was about to go wrong. It was like his eighth birthday, so perfect and idyllic until his parents informed him of their pending divorce.
As they exited the theater, Neil Perry caught within his father’s angry vice grip, Knox’s heart tightened. He felt like the other shoe had just dropped.

By morning Neil Perry was dead. Knox knew when Charlie appeared at his bedside like a specter, tears drawing neat lines down his cheeks but he could barely get through a sentence without crying. Knox felt hollow inside and he climbed out of bed to take Charlie into his arms. He held the sobbing boy by his bedside while tremorous sobs shook his body. Charlie had been one of the people closest to Neil. Knox loved him as all the Dead Poet’s did, but no one really knew him like Charlie seemed to.
Once Charlie could stand on his own, they created their own kind of funeral march, processing to Meeks and Pitts before all coming to Todd’s room. Todd would be the hardest to tell and they all knew it. Charlie was sent in and they all stood at the door, pajama-clad, tearful, and afraid of facing life without Neil Perry.
~
The service was as painful as Knox could have expected. A sham of a farewell to Neil and a gut-wrenching reminder that the school truly didn’t give a fuck about them.
At least until Cameron told. And Charlie punched him.
~
“Charlie!” Knox yelled as he sprinted down the stairs to find Charlie standing amongst suitcases of his belongings, picking at his nails. He had been expelled yesterday and hadn’t talked to anyone since. Knox hadn’t seen him at a meal and Cameron had been forced to sleep on the common room couch last night.
“Charlie,” Knox finally reached the boy who hadn’t looked him in the eye since the last meeting in the attic, “Were you going to leave

without saying goodbye?"
Still not making eye-contact he responded, "Maybe."
"I—I don't judge you for what you did. Cameron had it coming,"
Charlie remained silent, "You know I'm still your friend right?"
"A real friend would have let me kill Cameron without trying to intervene," Charlie said his first full sentence that day and smiled a little - Knox hadn't seen him smile since Neil died.
"Yeah maybe…" Knox trailed off. He wanted to say something, something great. Something that would make this all better and finally tell Charlie all the words that had been at the tip of his tongue for ages.
"You'll write me, won't you?"
"Yeah, sure. Anything you want," Replied Charlie absently, looking out the doors for his dad.
"You know I'm sorry, right? About the party and the article, and Chirs and everything else," his words were finally starting to flow.
"Sure you are. I'm sure you're very sorry now that you got the girl and everything's going to be fine for you Knox," he said sarcastically.
"You're going to be fine too Charlie, you're nearly in college. If you just keep your grades up you'll end up okay…"
"I don't care about college, fuck, Knox, I care about this. This school and these people and...you. I care about you," He said with a slight waver to his voice.
"Charlie," said Knox gently, "There will be someone else…"
"You don't even care, do you! Do you know, I saw stars when we kissed. Stars."
After a pause, Knox said, "I didn't see stars." Suddenly, he grabbed Charlie's face and brought their lips together as they had weeks ago. The kiss was short and fleeting, leaving Charlie breathless.
"I don't see stars, I see galaxies when I kiss you, Charlie."
The creak of the doors alerted the boys to the arrival of Mr. Dalton.
"Ah, young mister Overstreet, saying goodbye to your childhood pal?"
"Yes, sir," Said Knox, appearing as casual as could be while his body thrummed with energy.
"Well, enjoy the rest of your school year and say hello to your father for me."
"Of course sir. You'll write me, right Charlie?"
Charlie could barely stutter out a "Yeah" before Knox took off back to the dorms.

So what, he didn't have a way with words like Todd Anderson did. But he figured that kiss was what he had really needed to say all along.

Chapter End Notes

- I can’t stand writing the name Charlie anymore
- I wrote this fic by directly referencing the movie and script so I occasionally leave out descriptors of what’s happening, so if a scene seems empty that's on my bitch ass
- I feel like “we’re from the government, we’re here to help” is not the actual line but it’s so funny I’ve left it in
- This is probably the longest fit I have ever written and I’m so tired of it, the ending might suck but at the very least it’s finished!
- I listened to moonrise kingdom soundtrack while editing - if you can figure out why this is mildly relevant you get brownie points

So yeah, someone remind me to post the epilogue once the good good Chox stans of Ao3 need it.

Also also, merry crisis. happl new bear.

From Charlie

Chapter Summary

The Epilogue That We Needed One Quarantine Too Late

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Charlie had slipped out of the graduation ceremony before it was even halfway through and was now chain-smoking behind the cathedral of the military academy.
He despised every inch of the school. From the straight-backed teachers to even the straighter-backed students. Even the crowd he had thought he would fall in with, the hell-raisers, hadn't picked up a book once in their worthless lives. He had never considered himself smart by any means but thanks to Mr. K he always kept a poetry anthology around and hated that it brought him solace. He hated the discipline, hated the rules, hated the punishments (he would have assumed the position 20 times if it meant he never had to stand outside all night ever again.) He especially hated the fact that Neil would have come here.
The only reason he was at this school was because his dad had gotten a tip from the bereaved Perry family, and now behind every corner and statue lurked the shadow of his lost friend.
Every single one of his lunch hours or late nights lacked the laughter and mirth of his Dead Poets.
And every moment lacked the presence of his dear friend Knox.
Absence makes the heart grow fonder, his mother would say during this father's particularly long business trips and he never understood until now what that meant. He felt every second that Knox wasn't by his side and the hole in his life was palpable every day.
Knox's face floated in and out of Charlie's dreams, much to his waking chagrin.
He tried to write letters but they all sounded so corny and sappy and well, like something Knox would write.
But it didn't matter now, he was going home in a few minutes. The church bells were ringing, the graduating class must be processing out, and Charlie was onto his summer.
He put out his last cigarette and slipped through the backdoor into the cathedral. He danced past the families clustered around their perfect little military men, a man Charlie would never be, and thought about the lonely summer ahead. He only knew it would involve him

languishing away the days until the name Knox had no meaning and the painful hole would become just another dull crater on the surface of Charlie's planet.
He had finally muscled his way out of the church, passed the double doors, and scanned the crowd to look for his parents but instantly locked eyes with someone who made his heart stop.
Through a crowd of boys and their proud parents, Knox Overstreet was staring right at him. His hair was a little longer and he was maybe an inch taller but he was still wearing a sweater tied around his shoulders like a total nerd, and a smirk on his face that simply said, "Happy to see me?"
And Charlie was happy. He was so happy he dashed down the stairs and into the arms of his best friend, disregarding all the crewcutted boys and their families and even the possibility of his own family seeing this display of affection. None of it mattered, Knox was here. Knox stepped back due to the impact of Charlie practically tackling him but his arms still wrapped around Charlie. Charlie inhaled the scent of his sweet cinnamon cologne unsure of what he could even start to say to his friend.
"What are you doing here?" He said lamely when he finally pulled away. Knox's arms around him left a sensation on his body like a heat trail.
"I came to see you," said Knox smiling warmly, "It's been a little while since I've heard from you. How are you doing?"
"Um, I'm fine," Charlie croaked, long days of boot camp and crying where he hoped no one would find him flashed before his eyes.
"That's good, Hellton really hasn't been the same without you. The guys really miss you, I missed you."
"Oh really, um that's good, well not good I'm sorry you missed me, I just mean that I... missed you too." He stammered.
"Really? Because if you had actually missed me you would have written me a letter or even sent a pigeon to prove to me you weren't dead. Thank God our parents are friends or else I wouldn't have even known where the school was."
"You know I don't feel that way about you anymore," He said, lying quietly, "And I'm sorry for anything I said about Chris. How is she though? Doing well?"
"Chris is fine, we're friends now."
"Friends? Why? You nearly died multiple times trying to get into her pants," Charlie laughed at his own joke.
"Well, I told her about the last time I saw you and she said that I should figure that out before we got together. And I did - so I'm here now."
Charlie felt like he had just stepped onto a commuter rail. His heart

was racing and he had just entered dangerous territory. Did Knox know what he was saying?
“What do you mean by that?” said Charlie.
Knox leaned in and their shoulders made a wall against the world, keeping the spring day out and away from their secret.
Knox looked down into his eyes and said, “I want to be with you, Charlie. I think I knew it from when our dads introduced us as kids and you showed me the stream behind your house.”
“And we played pretend,” Charlie smiled at the memory.
“And you told me you had never shown that place to anyone, and when I asked you why you said…”
“‘I don’t like anyone as much as I like you, Knox,’” He finished, remembering perfectly.
Knox leaned in a little closer, he spoke quietly, “I don’t like anyone as much as I like you, Charlie. It took me a long time to realize that, but I promise you I know now that I want nothing more than you.”
“Can I give you something?” Charlie said quickly, withdrawing from the little world he and Knox had made with their bodies.
“Yes?” Said Knox skeptically.
Charlie started walking away, back towards the church, leaving Knox no choice but to follow him. In his excitement, he picked up speed and soon they were dashing up the stone stairs. The pair was only halfway up the stairs to the choir loft when Charlie turned and pinned Knox to the wall, finally kissing him after all these months. His hands went under Knox’s smooth jaw and Knox’s hands threaded through his hair. He opened his mouth to deepen the kiss and finally, he felt that he had seized the day.

Chapter End Notes

oops oops oops - I got so caught up in the quarantine depression and being stressed about starting college that I deadass just Forgot I Left Y'all Hanging on the epilogue.

Whelp, if you made it this far, congrats dude, I hope you like the thing I did instead of studying for tests that got cancelled by coronavirus anyway.

Anywho, love you all, I hope you enjoyed my magnum opus, crit accepted as always, I need to apply for an advanced writing course where I'm going to say "I have pursued creative writing in my free time" as a fancy way of saying I wrote a 10k fanfiction about a movie from the 80s so let's hope that my college allows me to take the course.

End Notes

Soooooo

I'm giving this fic as a gift to my friend for Christmas, so expect a part two update within the week and furthermore, I need criticism and edits like oxygen!

For context, my friend is a big English major/dark academia type and I kind of want this to be as high quality as possible.

So basically - please leave constructive criticism in the comments! I hope all the hungry chox/knarlie kids are somewhat satisfied now.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!